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ABSTRACT

Two approaches to bringing out student voices in writing are the the "workshop advocates approach" and the "critical pedagogy advocates approach." The first group views voice as "individual expression," while the second group views voice as "participation." Though both strive to respect the student's voice, they both fall short of offering the student the tools he or she needs to cultivate a writing voice. In brief, the writing workshop advocates work from romantic assumptions about the self--that it is a pre-existing entity, unitary, unfettered by social relations, autonomous. On the other hand, critical pedagogy advocates viewing the self as social, created out of cultural resources at hand; nevertheless they view that self as basically static. While a student's voice contributes to critical dialogue, critical pedagogy advocates' focus on voice-as-starting point leads to the neglect of how this critical dialogue then impacts the development of that student's voice. An alternative to these two views would perceive the self as something that is formed in conflict and cooperation with the array of discourses and interactions occurring within a classroom; in this view, the self would be dynamic, multiple, always changing. Writing and developing voice would involve the appropriation of others' language; it would involve risk and struggle. Several points should be noted about the process of "becoming"--the process of developing student voice: (1) "becoming" may not happen--the student could be shut down; (2) "becoming" involves the reconstruction of experience, the revision of the old; and (3) "becoming" cannot happen in isolation--students need each other. (Contains 65 references and 16 notes.) (TB)

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Rewriting Student Voice

by

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Introduction

Student voices have not fared well in our schools. Whether spoken or written, they have too often been reduced to lifeless, guarded responses--responses to the questions and assignments of powerful others, responses formed in the shadow of teacher scrutiny and evaluation. Given the fate of student voices, it is difficult to believe that traditional schooling contributes to the flourishing of individuality and democratic decision-making in society. Not surprisingly, then, progressive and radical visions of education have accorded student voice an important place in their critiques of traditional schooling and their proposals for change.

My paper is an extended meditation on alternative conceptions of student voice. I begin by characterizing two popular versions of voice. The first--voice as individual expression--is put forward by advocates of writing workshop approaches to the teaching of writing, such as Atwell (1987), Calkins, (1986, 1991), Graves (1983), and Murray (1985). Workshop advocates emphasize students' desire to express their unique selves in writing, and how traditional writing instruction frustrates this desire. The second conception of student voice--voice as participation--comes from advocates of critical pedagogy. These advocates, including Freire (1970, 1985), Giroux (1988; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991), and Simon (1987), call for critical dialogues among teachers and students. Within these dialogues, student voices would sound and be heard.[1]

I have learned much from writing workshop and critical pedagogy advocates, and have looked to their conceptions of voice in my work with experienced and future teachers, and in my teaching and research with students in a third grade writing workshop (Lensmire, 1993, 1994a, 1994b). However, in this work and my ongoing reading and study, I have also learned that there are serious problems with how student voice has thus far been conceived. In what follows, I examine these problems, and propose an alternative conception of student voice to those of critical pedagogy and workshop advocates--an alternative that affirms the strengths of these previous versions, as well as responds to their weaknesses. My goal is to conceive of student voice in a way that more adequately recognizes the "interactional and ideological complexities . . . of children's literacy lives" (Dyson, 1995, p. 20), so that we might, as educators and researchers, better support the flourishing of student voices in schools.

One final note: In her novel *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart*, Joyce Carol Oates (1990) tells a brief, provocative story about school writing that I will use as a starting point and connective thread for my reflections on student voice.[2] Among other things, the story reminds us that if all student voices have fared relatively badly in schools, *certain* student voices have fared worse than others. Let me restate my hope for my alternative conception of voice: that it do justice to the challenges confronting all students who would speak and write in schools, but especially those who find no easy place within the dominant meanings and values of our racist, sexist, and classist society.

Voice as individual expression

Joyce Carol Oates' novel is set in a small town in upstate New York in the 1950's. A young black man, Jinx Fairchild, is one of the main characters. At one point, Jinx writes a 500 word composition for his senior English class, and then receives comments and a grade from his white teacher, Mrs. Dunphy. The assigned topic of the composition is "I Believe" and we learn that Jinx

> Spends days on the assignment . . . writing and rewriting in a ferocity of concentration nearly as singleminded as his concentration on basketball. The effort is exhausting. He has never thought of the words on paper as expressions of the soul, the voice on paper a silent rendering of his own voice.

Unlike Mrs. Dunphy, workshop advocates don't believe in assigned topics because this takes control over the writing away from students, does not allow them the privileges of "real authorship." For workshop advocates, authors are writers who have control over, have "ownership" of their writing processes and texts. Real authorship involves "the fullest engagement of the writer in the production of meaningful text under the pressure of her conscious and unconscious intention" (Gilbert, 1989b, p. 15). Students-as-authors, then, have the right to identify, for themselves, topics and purposes for writing that are worthy of their time and effort.

Jinx would make workshop advocates proud. Although Mrs. Dunphy assigned the topic for Jinx's writing, he obviously deemed the "I Believe" theme worthy, and pursued it through multiple drafts and revisions across a number of days. More important, however, was his realization that "words on paper" could be "expressions of the soul." Jinx's struggle to have his voice on paper be "a silent rendering of his own voice" is exactly the struggle, the task, that workshop advocates would have students take up in writing class.

Workshop approaches emphasize the work of finding your own voice in your writing. Finding your voice involves looking to your own experiences for what it is you have and want to say. Calkins (1986), for example, asserts that we write in order to "turn the chaos into something beautiful" and "to uncover and to celebrate the organizing patterns of our existence" (p. 3). There are strong affinities here to Emerson, Thoreau, American Romanticism, a celebration of experience and an individualistic, non-conformist strain. The image is one of burrowing deep into subjectivity, past "the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition" (Thoreau, 1960/1854, p. 66) to discover your authentic nature, and a voice that expresses who you are.

Workshop advocates assume that students are best able to find their individual voices when they are allowed to pursue their own intentions and topics, rather than those forced on them by the teacher. From this perspective, the "I Believe" theme worked for Jinx because it put him on the terrain of personal experience and belief, allowed him to draw on personal resources he might otherwise not be able to draw upon. In this sense, for workshop advocates every bit of authentic writing, every act of real authorship in the writing classroom, pursues the "I Believe" theme. And if it weren't for traditional teaching methods, students would gladly be pursuing this theme and themselves in print, because they want to.

> Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, pens or pencils . . . anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, "I am."
>
> "No, you aren't," say most school approaches to the teaching of writing. (Graves, 1983, p. 3)

No you aren't, said Mrs. Dunphy to Jinx Fairchild:

> When he gets the composition back he sees to his shame that his teacher Mrs. Dunphy has marked it in red: numerous grammatical errors, several run-on sentences, a fatal "lack of clarity." The grade is D+, one of the lowest grades Jinx Fairchild has received in English, in years.
>
> "Ordinarily I would give a paper like this an F," Mrs. Dunphy says, peering up at Jinx over her half-moon glasses with a steely little smile of reproach. "You know the rule, Jinx, don't you? No run-on sentences."
>
> Jinx mumbles, "Yes, ma'am."
>
> "Didn't I write it out on the blackboard? NO RUN-ON SENTENCES."
>
> "Yes, ma'am."

With her talk of error and inadequacy, Mrs. Dunphy dismisses Jinx's attempt to express his very soul on the page as quickly and easily as she might erase from the chalkboard what seems her dominant goal for school writing: NO RUN-ON SENTENCES.[3] Of course, we are on very comfortable ground here, as we root for Jinx against Mrs. Dunphy, a teacher who would ignore the personal meaning he is trying to make and focus on mechanical correctness. And as long as we stay on this ground, as long as our story is essentially a Romantic one of bad social institutions threatening the development and integrity of the unique individual, workshop notions of voice remain relatively safe and persuasive.[4] Schools have denied and shut out individual student voices--writing workshops will allow them to sound.

But Mrs. Dunphy herself disrupts this satisfying story as she continues her response. It seems that her teacherly expectations for an "I Believe" theme have brought out a little of the workshop advocate in her. She was looking for Jinx's soul on the page, and she didn't find it. The "fatal lack of clarity" that at first appeared to be just another disparaging comment aimed at Jinx's writing performance, may actually be questioning the relation of Jinx to his paper. For Mrs. Dunphy, the relation is not one of clarity--this paper just doesn't seem a clear reflection or representation of Jinx's authentic nature.

> "And is the argument wholly your own?" Mrs. Dunphy asks doubtfully. "It doesn't sound . . . like something you'd be thinking."
>
> Jinx Fairchild stands silent as if confused. Is the white woman accusing him of cheating?
>
> As if reading his thoughts Mrs. Dunphy adds quickly, "The tone of the composition doesn't sound like *you*, Jinx. It sounds like somebody else, a stranger. It isn't *you*. And the thinking is muddled and incoherent." She gives a breathy little laugh, uneasy, annoyed: this tall hooded-eyed Negro boy standing there so unnaturally still.

We may interpret this exchange as the continued dismissal of Jinx's individuality--a dismissal accomplished this time, not by pointing to the mechanics of his writing, but to the content of his essay. The teacher tells the student to tell her who he is and what he believes. He does. She tells him, from her position of authority and across lines of gender and race, "No, that's not who you are." The problem, then, is not that she asks him to express himself on the page, but that she doesn't accept or recognize Jinx when he does.

I will return to this problem later in the paper. At this point, I want to note one final aspect of voice for workshop advocates that Mrs. Dunphy's interactions with Jinx Fairchild help us understand.

Workshop advocates do not only assume that it is a good thing to tap into and express your real, authentic self in your writing, and that when you do, your writing is marked by your own unique voice. They also assume a particular conception of the *self* to be tapped: a traditional Enlightenment conception, in which the self is imagined to be stable, coherent, unitary, and autonomous. Thus far, workshop advocates have paid little attention to the serious criticisms this conception of self has received from, among others, psychoanalytic, feminist, and postmodernist theorists (see Flax, 1990), and they have ignored alternative conceptions which, while certainly differing in important ways, point to a vision of the self as dynamic, in process, multiple, and formed within social relations with others. As Willinsky (1990) has noted: "The self, as that pure and singular essence of our being, is no longer a reliable figure in the psychological or literary landscape" (p. 220).

This unreliable figure carries workshop advocates' conception of voice, and we can see this figure at work in Mrs. Dunphy's response to Jinx. Mrs. Dunphy assumes that Jinx's self is stable and unitary--certainly solid enough that she can say no, that's not Jinx, when she reads his paper. She denies that multiple voices might sound within Jinx's subjectivity, that what "sounds like somebody else, a stranger" might be part of Jinx's self.

Mrs. Dunphy may call him Jinx, but she really only knows the "Iceman"--a persona that Jinx adopts, rather consciously, while in school and other times he is challenged or threatened. Jinx is also known as Iceman on the basketball court. The Iceman is cool, unflappable, aloof. always in control.[5] But Jinx's self is not exhausted with the Iceman--alongside this persona, there is Verlyn (not Jinx) Fairchild, who his mom loves and talks with at home; and beneath and in interaction with Verlyn and the Iceman are other postures, other voices, that make up Jinx.

Mrs. Dunphy was looking for *Jinx*. When, instead, she got a glimpse of something else, something less unitary, less finished, she could only be confused, disturbed, name it "muddled and incoherent."

Mrs. Dunphy assigned an "I Believe" paper. She assumed that Jinx would sit down, take a look at himself and what he believed, and write that down. The image is consistent with workshop images of writers at work--the solitary writer and his struggle to have the voice on paper be a "silent rendering of his own voice." What Mrs. Dunphy and workshop advocates don't seem to recognize--or more precisely, what their conceptions of voice, self, and writing make difficult to consider--is that writers are not really isolated individuals, but embedded (for Jinx, embroiled) in important social relations with others that influence the work of writing and creating a self.

For in Oates' novel, one of Jinx Fairchild's problems is that he is tied to two white youths in complex relations of love, solidarity, hate, and violence. Where Mrs. Dunphy looks for a calm reflection on the "I Believe" theme, Jinx looks to figure out his place and moral responsibility within these relations, as well as in relation to society and God. Oates shares only a small part of Jinx's composition with her readers, and we can't tell if this part is from an early or late draft, from beginning, middle, or end of the piece. We *can* tell that Jinx is seeking to define himself and his place in the world:

> I believe we are born with Sin on our head and must labor to cleans ourselves all the days of our life. It is not a matter of Gods punishment but of Conscience, if there is no God nor Jesus Christ there is still Human Conscience.

Jinx labored to have the words on paper be "expressions of the soul," and this is the goal that writing workshop advocates promote for individual students in writing classrooms with the idea of personal voice. We should affirm at least two related aspects of this conception of voice.

First, the workshop emphasis on student voice entails a commitment to taking students' experiences and meanings seriously, in contrast to traditional pedagogies that often run roughshod over personal meaning in the name of teacher control and convention. I agree with Willinsky (1990) that to "diminish the potential for individual meaningfulness in students' work is a denial of their basic humanity" (p. 209). The goal of voice is part of workshop attempts to humanize writing pedagogy through the acceptance and encouragement of students' assertions of "I am" in the classroom.

Second, the idea of voice is linked to the vision of students bringing themselves--their interests, energies, hopes, experiences--to their work with texts. Again, in contrast to traditional pedagogies that not only put meaning at risk in the classroom, but often demand passivity from students, workshop approaches ask students to pursue, vigorously, the purposes and topics that the students themselves find compelling. For workshop advocates, there can be no personal voice in the writing without this personal investment, this active student engagement.

But even as we affirm workshop commitments to personal meaningfulness and engagement, we must recognize that the particular conception of voice workshop advocates have put forward--one grounded in an Enlightenment conception of the self and images of the solitary writer pursuing personal meaning--can get us into trouble. The workshop conception of voice assumes a stable, preexistent self that can be more or less expressed in writing. But as Harris (1987) notes: "Writing is not simply a tool we use to express a self we already have; it is a means by which we form a self to express" (p. 161). It is not just that one conception of voice is more or

less accurate. The conception of voice we bring to our work matters for how we think about Jinx and our students, for how we might judge Mrs. Dunphy's and our own responses to student texts, for how we imagine our teacher practice and responsibilities.

Workshop advocates are not the only educators who have made voice an important part of their approach to education. Advocates of critical pedagogy have as well. Their conception of voice, like the workshop one, emphasizes the importance and value of student experience and engagement. Unlike the workshop version, and to its advantage, the conception of voice in critical pedagogy assumes a multiple, social self. In the next section, I examine the treatment of student voice in work on critical pedagogy.

Voice as participation

> A radical theory of voice represents neither a unitary subject position unrelated to wider social formations nor the unique expression of the creative and unfettered bourgeois subject. Both of these positions depoliticize and dehistoricize voice by removing it from the arena of power, difference, and struggle. A radical theory of voice signifies the social and political formations that provide students with the experiences, language, histories, and stories that construct the subject positions that they use to give meaning to their lives. (Giroux, 1991, p. 100)

For writing workshop advocates, voice is tied to the notion of a unitary, unfettered individual self. Advocates of critical pedagogy assume no such self. For them, the self is a social one, created out of the cultural resources at hand. This does not mean that the self is envisioned as *determined* by these cultural resources, in the strong sense that the passive individual becomes whatever is dictated by an overpowering social context. The resources available--the experiences, languages, histories, stories--obviously constrain the possible selves you can become. At the same time, they provide possibilities, possibilities that can be more or less consciously worked in the creation of a self. As Emerson (1986) expressed it: "One makes a self through the words one has learned, fashions one's own voice and inner speech by a selective appropriation of the voices of others" (p. 31).

The space for choosing, for fashioning yourself out of the words of others, is enlarged by the complexity and plurality of the social contexts of our lives. No environment, as Dewey (1983/22) noted, is "all of one piece" (p. 90). Instead, society is marked by a multiplicity of cultures, meanings, and values--a state of affairs that is inscribed in language, and that Bakhtin (1981) named "heteroglossia":

> Thus at any given moment in its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (p. 291)

For Bakhtin, these diverse "languages" of heteroglossia[6] express particular stances or positions on the world; they represent "forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (pp. 291, 292).

Critical pedagogy advocates would have us pay attention not only to the plurality Bakhtin evokes with his notion of heteroglossia, but also asymmetries of power across this diversity (note Bakhtin's "top to bottom")--asymmetries that enable powerful groups to define their own particular "ways with words" (Heath, 1983) as *the* valued ways in society. As Giroux (1991) notes,

> What meanings are considered the most important, what experiences are deemed the most legitimate, and what forms of writing and reading matter, are largely determined by those groups who control the economic and cultural apparatuses of a given society. (p. 93)

Dominant groups determine dominant meanings, but not without a struggle, and never once and for all. In fact, the larger educational and political project of critical pedagogy is exactly to empower students to engage in this struggle over meaning--in solidarity with the wretched of the earth; in the name of social justice, equality, and democratic community; and in preparation for and as part of transformative social action.

We are ready to characterize voice in critical pedagogy. I will develop this characterization through a series of contrasts between voice in critical pedagogy and voice in writing workshop approaches.

For workshop advocates, voice signals the unique expression of the unique individual. Voice serves to distinguish individual writers from other writers. For advocates of critical pedagogy, voice signals *participation*, an active part in the social production of meaning. Voice points to the "discursive means whereby teachers and students attempt to make themselves present and to define themselves as active authors of their own world" (Simon, 1987, p. 377). If the workshop sense of voice is evoked with the contrast, "my words versus someone else's words," then the contrast to voice within critical pedagogy is silence, where silence points to oppressive conditions that keep certain people from speaking and being heard. Rather than emphasize the attempt to distinguish yourself from others, voice, here, emphasizes inserting yourself and your texts into public spheres.

One way to contrast writing workshop and critical pedagogy versions of voice, then, is in their relations to democratic theory. If we think of democracy in terms of liberty and popular sovereignty, then the workshop commitment to voice is concerned primarily--perhaps exclusively--with liberty, especially freedom of thought and expression. A commitment to liberty is certainly a part of critical pedagogy, since students need to be free to express themselves in the classroom in order to participate in the moral and political project envisioned by its advocates. But in the main, voice in critical pedagogy is linked to the goal of popular sovereignty, to making power "accountable . . . to those affected by its exercise" (Bowles & Gintis, 1987, p. 4). Critical pedagogy is concerned to have students be active participants in the construction of their worlds, rather than trapped in the meanings, subjectivities, and forms of authority determined by powerful others.

Voice also serves different functions within the pedagogical schemes of writing workshop approaches and critical pedagogy. For workshop advocates, voice is the goal, the desired endpoint, for any given piece of student writing. It is a criteria with which to judge the success of the writing and instruction--without that stamp of individuality, without "the imprint of ourselves on our writing" (Graves, 1983, p. 227), the text and teaching have failed. Within critical pedagogy, however, voice is less a goal or endpoint in itself, and more a necessary precondition for the collective work to be done. Voice is a starting point in critical pedagogy, in at least two ways.[7]

First, advocates of critical pedagogy assert that the affirmation of students' own experiences, languages, and stories is crucial. For these advocates, traditional pedagogies belittle and alienate students by not respecting and working with the ways that they make sense of their worlds and themselves. Giroux and McLaren (1986) write that "student experience is the stuff of culture, agency, and identity formation and must be given preeminence in an emancipatory curriculum" (p. 234). To not affirm and respect student voices is both morally wrong, because it disparages who students are and what they know, and strategically a mistake, because students will resist becoming active partners in teaching and learning. Thus, student voice is a starting point in the sense that this moral and political project can't be a truly participatory project without it.

Second, voice is a starting point in that it provides resources, material, with which the classroom community can work. Student voices make available a multiplicity of texts that can be examined, learned from and criticized. Critical pedagogy's emphasis on voice, then, is very much in the spirit of Dewey's (1980/1899) call for a transformed recitation. In the traditional recitation, individual students answered teacher questions for the purpose of displaying what they had memorized from the textbook in a competition for teacher rewards. Dewey imagined a different sort of recitation, one where the recitation

> Becomes the social clearing-house, where experiences and ideas are exchanged and subjected to criticism, where misconceptions are corrected, and new lines of thought and inquiry are set up. (p. 34)

Workshop advocates sometimes recognize the wealth of material made available by student voices, but their responses to this wealth diverge, again in instructive ways, from those of critical pedagogists. Witness Murray (1985):

> I read their papers and share their surprise in their own diversity with them, and I know that I will never burn out, that I will never lose my excitement at my own and students' explorations of our world with the writing process. (p. 248)

I find two aspects of Murray's comments striking. First, how private this is, in ways reminiscent of Jinx's conversation with Mrs. Dunphy. There is no sense of student papers somehow contributing to a collective project--the projects here are private ones, pursued by individual students, supported by the teacher. In another piece, Murray (1979) writes of his work as "this strange, exposed kind of teaching, one on one" (p. 14). The exposure of this teaching is, of course, the exposure of authentic selves in the writing and response. The wealth of student voices is, here, a private wealth, accumulated by individual students and teachers in private transactions.

Second, there is no hint in Murray's comments that teachers will ever have to take up a critical position vis a vis the meanings of student papers. Above, he talks of surprise and excitement. At other times Murray (1985) points to pursuing, with students, "professional discussion between writers about what works and what needs work" (p. 140). Never is there mention of the need for teachers to question or criticize students' intentions and meanings.

Gilbert's (1989a, 1989b, 1994) work helps us understand this lack of criticism. She argues that the notion of personal voice ties student-written text and student tightly together. One consequence of this merging of text and student is that student texts "are seen to be so closely aligned to the individual child and that child's original making of meaning that they are 'beyond criticism'" (1989a, p. 198). In other words, any criticism of the meanings students make with their texts can be interpreted as a disparagement of or attack on the person of the student. For workshop advocates, teachers may certainly help students with the technique of their writing processes and texts, because this helps students express their own meanings more effectively. But writing teachers are to ignore the content of children's work, except to help students pursue it more effectively (Lensmire, 1993).

Gilbert also points to some of the trouble that this notion of personal voice gets us into. For what if the authentic student voice is, say, a sexist one, as in an example Gilbert (1989a) provides from a Year 5 writing workshop in Australia? Gilbert tells of the collaborative effort of four 9-year-old boys who wrote themselves into their own fictional story of war and destruction. They made themselves heros, of course. They also wrote seven girls from the class into their tale. Six of these girls are given stereotypical roles in the story--"having 'affairs', holding hands with boys, getting married, saying 'I love you'"--before becoming victims of war, disposed of in "reasonably ugly ways" (p. 200). The one girl to escape the textual fate of stereotype and death happens to be the biggest girl in the class. In the story, she jumps on top of the enemy and scares

them off for a while. She also gets called "Super Blubber." As Gilbert notes:

> No need to kill off this female: her size and aggression have effectively excluded her anyway (what worse fate for a girl than to be called Super Blubber?). (p. 200)

Are we, with Murray, to marvel at this exploration of the world by these young boys, and help them make it work even more effectively?

Critical pedagogy's conception of voice leads us into no such trap. Individual student's voices are assumed to arise from a social self, shaped and created in social contexts of great diversity. Student voices are formed within an oppressive society that privileges the meanings, values, and stories of some over others. These voices--like the voices of teachers, curriculum-developers, novelists, scientists--are assumed to be necessarily partial, express a particular position on the world that will make possible certain understandings and constrain others. Consequently, critical pedagogists say, over and over again, that student voices must be not only affirmed, but also questioned.

> Developing a pedagogy that takes the notion of student voice seriously means developing a critically affirmative language that works both *with and on* the experiences that students bring to the classroom. This means taking seriously and confirming the language forms, modes of reasoning, dispositions, and histories that give students an active voice in defining the world; it also means working on the experiences of such students in order for them to examine both their strengths and weaknesses. (Giroux, 1991, p. 104; author's emphasis)

Critical educators may certainly marvel at the diversity of experiences, languages, and stories that are called forth with the elicitation and affirmation of student voice in the classroom. But there is also work to be done; a critical testing of these voices for what they can teach us, and how they can and cannot contribute to the creation of a better world. For Murray and other workshop advocates, the sounding of the voices of heteroglossia in the classroom is already a better world. Maybe so. For advocates of critical pedagogy, this heteroglossia may, unfortunately, sound too much like the already existing world, and be in need of criticism and revision.

It should be obvious that I find much about critical pedagogists' treatment of voice attractive and persuasive. I value their assumption of a social self developing in multicultural contexts. I affirm, in general, the critical democratic project they are pursuing. Within this perspective, voice is conceived of in terms of participation in the construction and reconstruction of the world and the ways we make sense of it. Advocates of critical pedagogy avoid an uncritical stance in relation to student meaning-making, while at the same time asserting the worth and importance of student voice to an emancipatory educational project.

But writing workshop and critical pedagogy versions of voice also share important similarities (Giroux, 1987). Both would have student voice flourish in the classroom. Both seek to humanize teaching and learning in schools through the acceptance and affirmation of student voice. Both encourage the active exploration by students of their worlds, rather than passive submission in the face of teacher control and knowledge.

Unfortunately, critical pedagogy and writing workshop conceptions of voice also share at least one serious weakness: Neither has come to grips adequately with what *conflict* among voices--conflict generated among students, between teacher and students, and within individual students--means for the actual production of speech and writing within classrooms. I explore this shared weakness in the next section, as part of the groundwork for a revised conception of voice.

Voice and classroom conflict

There is something of a tension between workshop advocates' characterization of writing as a personal, individual activity, and their prescriptions for how workshops should be set up and run. On the one hand, the guiding image to which students and teachers should aspire is the solitary author in pursuit of personal meaning in private writing projects. On the other hand, workshop advocates would organize writing workshops as very sociable places to write and learn--supportive writing conferences with peers and the teacher, collaborative writing projects, regular opportunities to receive response and affirmation from the class during sharing time, and classroom libraries housing student-written work, make for workshop settings that are rich with possibilities for social interaction. Indeed, Cazden (1994) thinks that workshops may be considered "one of the best examples of 'cooperative learning,' so widely advocated for today's schools" (p. vii).

In other words, workshop rhetoric champions the solitary writer, even as its actual classroom practices throw the student writer into multiple, shifting relations with peers and the teacher. This tension is eased somewhat by emphasizing individual student choice and initiative in taking advantage of opportunities for social interaction in the writing workshop. The student writer is portrayed by workshop advocates as in control, as the one who determines when and how to interact with others. Atwell (1987), for example, writes that "small groups form and disband in the minutes it takes for a writer to call on one or more other writers, move to a conference corner, share a piece or discuss a problem, and go back to work with a new perspective on the writing" (p. 41). In this way, workshop advocates can assume both that real writing is intensely individual and personal, and that student writers need help from others.

Of course, these others are always eager to help, and give the help the writer wants and needs--at least in advocates' accounts of workshops.[8] Consequently, within these accounts, there is little room or cause for consideration of social conflict within the classroom. And there's the rub. For actual workshops are not so conflict-free. Certainly, easy access to peers and teachers within workshops provides opportunities for social interactions that can support and inspire individual writers. But these opportunities for social interaction are also opportunities for conflict and risk, openings for peer and teacher audiences to push back, in negative ways, on student voice. While there truly are important differences between workshops and Jackson's (1968) traditional classroom, his "crowds, praise, and power" remains an apt description of workshop life.

At first glance, it seems silly to assert that advocates of critical pedagogy are, like workshop advocates, blind to conflict. And in important ways, they aren't. The cultural politics perspective these writers bring to their work on voice assumes conflict across and within the border lines of social groups in society, assumes struggles over identity, meaning, authority. Furthermore, advocates of critical pedagogy know that asymmetries in power give dominant groups the advantage in these struggles, and that certain groups--women, people of color, the working class, gays and lesbians--find themselves in continuing conflict with the dominant meanings and values of society.

Conflict penetrates fairly deeply into the discourse of critical pedagogy. Unfortunately, it does not penetrate to the level of face-to-face (or in your face) interactions in the classroom. Somehow, the sweaty, painful struggles over meaning that characterize life in society are left at the classroom door of critical pedagogists. Within, the sharing and questioning of student voices leads, it seems, to cool conflicts of interpretation, rather than heated confrontations between actual people who, in expressing themselves, find themselves at odds.[9] And while advocates of critical pedagogy recognize asymmetries of power across classroom participants (specifically, teacher and student), they have, as Ellsworth (1989) notes, "made no systematic examination of the barriers that this imbalance throws up to the kind of student expression and dialogue they prescribe" (p. 309).

In the end, neither workshop advocates nor advocates of critical pedagogy embed student voice in the immediate social context of the classroom, and consequently, they ignore important problems and issues attending the speech and writing of students there. Writing workshop advocates embed voice in the inner context of the author's intentions, desires, dreams, experiences; when the social context of the workshop is considered at all, it is only as a friendly one that supports individual students' expression. Critical pedagogy advocates embed voice in politics and history writ large, rather than within the local meanings, values, and relations--the micropolitics and microhistories--of particular classrooms.

In my own teaching and research in a third grade writing workshop, I found that the local peer relations among children were extremely important influences on children's activities and texts in the classroom, and not always in positive directions (Lensmire, 1994a). Children used the relative control they exerted over their own movement and writing processes within the workshop to divide themselves up along gender and social class lines. Girls conferenced and collaborated with girls, boys with boys. And middle-class children tended to work within shifting groups of middle-class friends, and to avoid association with the working-class children who lived in a large trailer park in the middle of the mainly suburban community this school served.

Instead of the uniformly supportive workshop context that workshop advocates imagine, individual children felt they were confronted with multiple peer audiences that they judged to be more or less supportive, *more or less hostile*, to their attempts at expression. In other words, children, especially unpopular children, felt that there were serious risks involved in writing for peer audiences--risks to their sense of self, to what they valued and cared about, to their social standing in relations with others. Children's responses to these risks included seeking out certain classmates for writing conferences--classmates individual children thought were safe and desirable audiences for their writing--and avoiding others. In their writing, children avoided genres and topics that they felt involved too much exposure of self. Some children chose not to insert themselves and their texts into public spaces within the workshop, spaces such as sharing time and the workshop library--spaces created exactly to allow all children's voices to sound and be heard within the classroom community.

Unpopular children (mostly from the trailer park, a few not) felt these risks most keenly. The upshot is that students--not just teachers--can silence students' voices in classrooms. One of the most unpopular children in the class summarized it this way. When asked why some children felt comfortable sharing their work during sharing time and she didn't, she replied: "Because they have lots of friends."[10]

If possibilities for conflict and risk attend peer relations in classrooms, they also attend relations between teacher and student. Workshop and critical pedagogy advocates recognize these possibilities to the extent that their stories and criticisms of traditional pedagogy are concerned, in varying ways, with student voice taking a beating in its struggle with powerful teacher and curriculum voices. What these advocates recognize less often is that there are possibilities for trouble between teachers and students even when the teacher rejects traditional practices and embraces workshop or critical pedagogy approaches to teaching and learning in classrooms.

McCarthey (1994) provides a worthy example in her story of Anita, an 11 year old girl in a 5th/6th grade writing class in New York. Anita's teacher, Ms. Meyer, was inspired by Calkins' (1991) discussion of writers' notebooks to have her students keep notebooks of their own. When it came time for Anita to write a piece from her notebook, she thought that she might write about her experiences at camp. Her teacher, however, worried that such a topic lacked impact and focus, that Anita would be unable to write about these experiences with the sort of powerful, personal voice workshop advocates call for. After an examination of Anita's notebook, Ms. Meyer thought that material concerning Anita's relationship with her father could be developed into a strong piece, and she encouraged Anita to write about that.

Ms. Meyer was in good workshop form. She carefully read Anita's notebook, and tried to help Anita identify a topic--within the realm of Anita's own experiences--worthy of Anita's

attention and effort. She didn't demand that Anita write about her father, but did *encourage* her to do so.

Now Anita had a problem, for she didn't want to write about her father. Anita hadn't spelled it out in her notebook, and Ms. Meyer didn't know: Anita didn't want to write about her father because he physically abused her and her brother. But how can she not write about this topic and still please her teacher, Ms. Meyer? And if she doesn't want to tell Ms. Meyer about her relationship with her father, she can't even reveal her real reasons for avoiding this topic.

Eventually, Anita came up with a fairly ingenious solution to her writing problem. She wrote about someone who was close to her, but not abusive--her grandfather. This allowed her to fulfill Ms. Meyer's seeming desire that she write about her relationship with an important person in her life, without exposing certain facets of her personal life to public scrutiny.

Let me draw one moral from this story: encouragement is sometimes not far from coercion in the classroom, given unequal power relations among teachers and students. Teachers and students confront each other in a social context not necessarily conducive to free and open talk and writing. As Gilbert (1994) reminds us,

> A number of different and incompatible discourses mesh at the site of the classroom because schools are about--among other things--selection and sorting, discipline and punishment, knowledge and control. (p. 264)

The institutional authority of the teacher in school does not just go away when that teacher chooses to engage in alternative teaching practices; it remains for the student to negotiate with the teacher, or work through, or (as in Anita's case) work around. It's a complicated business.

It's a complicated business that is passed over too quickly in critical pedagogists' calls for the questioning of student voice in the classroom. Anita and Ms. Meyer's story suggests that teachers can inadvertently confound student expression just in trying to affirm and support students' explorations of meaningful content.[11] What risks for student expression, then, attend the questioning--no, let's use the term Giroux (1986) sometimes uses--the *interrogation* of student voice by the teacher?

In their work on women's development of voice, self, and mind, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) argue that a "doubting" model of education may be "peculiarly inappropriate" for women, if not inappropriate for men as well. They write:

> On the whole, women found the experience of being doubted debilitating rather than energizing. . . . Because so many women are already consumed with self-doubt, doubts imposed from outside seem at best redundant and at worst destructive, confirming the women's own sense of themselves as inadequate knowers. (p. 228)

I should note that Belenky and her co-authors are not arguing for an uncritical stance in relation to the world or the way the world is represented in the voices of students, teachers, and books--they would have teachers and students critically examine their worlds together. They also do not explicitly name critical pedagogy as a doubting model of education. In fact, they draw on Freire (1970) in their critique of traditional schooling, and also explicitly link their alternative vision of education--what they call "connected teaching"--to Freire's notion of a "problem-posing education."

Still, I take their doubts about doubting as words of caution for critical educators intent on interrogating student voice in the classroom. One of the reasons that I am not surprised that Belenky et al. refer approvingly to Freire is that he takes pains to explore and name the sorts of teacher qualities and educational conditions that can lessen the risks for students of sharing and exposing their meanings and values to others. But the risks remain. Simply supporting student voice in classrooms may be hard enough to accomplish. Advocates of critical pedagogy ask

teachers to support and question student expression. Rather than pushing classroom participants' thought and action forward to increasingly critical evaluations of their world, such questioning could encourage students to not speak their mind, or to look for the correct thing to say to please the teacher. At times, critical pedagogists seem overconfident that student voice will flourish in the face of questioning.

When we left Mrs. Dunphy and Jinx above, neither Jinx nor Mrs. Dunphy were flourishing. Jinx had endured criticisms of his RUN-ON SENTENCES and doubts that the "I" of his "I Believe" essay was really himself. Mrs. Dunphy was feeling uneasy, even annoyed with "this tall hooded-eyed Negro boy standing there so unnaturally still." She and Jinx were entangled in those "different and incompatible discourses" Gilbert (1994) warned us about, and Mrs. Dunphy is now a little worried that she has pushed too hard on Jinx. It's time for some repair work on their relationship as teacher and student, so she points to a way that Jinx's work can be redeemed, and that he can receive the reward that she is sure he wants, and is hers to bestow.

Attend. She doesn't understand the inadequacy of the repair work she proposes, doesn't understand the distance between Jinx and her, the conflict masked in the polite voice Jinx uses at school.

> He's about to turn away so Mrs. Dunphy says, relenting, "If you rewrite it, making corrections, I might raise the grade. I might make an exception, this time."
>
> Jinx mumbles, "Yes, ma'am."
>
> "Will you, then?"
>
> "Ma'am?"
>
> "Rewrite it, make corrections? Hand it back in again, by Monday?"
>
> Jinx slips the composition in his notebook. His heart is beating hard and steady, keeping him cool, Iceman style. He's thinking that once there's blood on your hands, blood cries out for blood, doesn't it? This white bitch on her fat girdled ass, looking up at him with a fond-familiar smile, as if she has the right.
>
> He says, "Yes, ma'am, thank you, ma'am, I sure will."
>
> And he does. And the grade is raised to B+.

I confess that the first time I read through this vignette about Jinx and Mrs. Dunphy, the last sentence--"And the grade is raised to B+"--almost made me whoop out loud with angry satisfaction. For it seems that Jinx wins in his struggle with Mrs. Dunphy over his paper. Not only does he get the B+, but we also get to see him tell off Mrs. Dunphy, even if only inside his head. Jinx doesn't give in to Mrs. Dunphy and her definition of the situation, and he doesn't let her win by acquiescing to the initial grade she gave him.

But upon reflection, we also know that revising must have cost him, that the decision and labor to change his paper to please Mrs. Dunphy--Mrs. Dunphy with the "fond-familiar smile" that she has no right to share with him--could not have been easy. In the rewriting of his paper, Jinx had to choose among conflicting meanings and desires, had to orient himself among the voices of teacher and student, male and female, Black and White, among the voices of Iceman and Verlyn (the agent of his mother's hopes). We can almost hear Jinx's teeth grinding as he "fixes" his RUN-ON SENTENCES and makes the voice of the paper conform to the voice Mrs. Dunphy knows is *Jinx*.

This inner dialogue and struggle, then, is the third kind of conflict (along with conflict among peers and between teacher and student) that workshop and critical pedagogy advocates have not confronted in their writing on student voice. Workshop advocates recognize that the writer faces difficulties in capturing complex experiences in words, difficulties in finding outer words to express inner meanings. But their conceptions of self and writing make it difficult to address the inner conflicts that attend having to use *others'* words, when those others are different from, opposed to, and more powerful than you. Bakhtin (1981) noted that

> Not all words for just anyone submit easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them . . . it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. (p. 294).

Stephan Daedalus, the young Irish protagonist of James Joyce's (1976/16) ***A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***, expressed it this way, in his inner reflections on a conversation he was having with an English priest (who was also a dean at his school). Their discussion was moving, somewhat haphazardly, through questions of esthetic theory and how to light fires and lamps, when the two discovered that they used a different word to name the same object--Stephan called the priest's "funnel" a "tundish." The priest, with a courtesy that Stephan thought rang false, called tundish "a most interesting word" and repeated it several times to himself. For Stephan, this "little word seemed to have turned a rapier point of his sensitiveness against this courteous and vigilant foe," the priest. Although English is the shared native tongue of both Stephan and the priest--as it is for Jinx and Mrs. Dunphy--Daedalus believes that

> The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (p. 189)[12]

Advocates of critical pedagogy, with their assumption of a multiple, social self, certainly are in better position than workshop advocates to recognize the inner struggles of Anita, Jinx and Stephan. When Giroux (1991) writes that one's voice "constitutes forms of subjectivity that are multilayered, mobile, complex, and shifting" (p. 100), he is pointing to a conception of voice that is not far from acknowledging inner conflict in the production of speech and writing in schools. Unfortunately, critical pedagogists have not usually pushed this far. Their conception of voice, as Ellsworth (1989) notes,

> Does not confront the ways in which any individual student's voice is already a "teeth gritting" and often contradictory intersection of voices constituted by gender, race, class, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or ideology. . . . It is impossible to speak from all voices at once, or from any one, without traces of the others being present and interruptive. (p. 312)

Before I close this section, I should interpret the references to "blood on your hands" and "blood cries out for blood" that interrupted Jinx's inner musings, above, as he considered the smiling Mrs. Dunphy who sat before him. What you don't know if you haven't read Oates' novel--and what Mrs. Dunphy never knows--is that Jinx is struggling with "Human Conscience" in his "I Believe" essay because he has killed someone.

Jinx killed "Little Red" Garlock, a white boy about Jinx's age. Jinx killed him partly in self-defense; partly in defense of a white girl, Iris, who Jinx had befriended; partly because things never quite work out the way you expect them to. The fact that Jinx might be considered *innocent* of murder--innocent in legal and moral senses of the word--does not mean that Jinx considers himself so. This is part of his inner struggle.

Another part is that he doesn't feel that he can share what has happened with anyone other than Iris, who was a witness to the brutal fight within which Little Red was killed; and he is cut off even from Iris because of societal norms proscribing association between Blacks and Whites.

He wants to tell his parents, but fears the hurt he will cause in the telling, as well as fears that they will make him tell the police. As a young black male, he knows his dreams, his parents' dreams, of a basketball scholarship and college will never be realized if he tells.

Little Red Garlock was loathed by Whites and Blacks alike--after he dropped out of school, he liked to roam the streets on his bicycle, calling sexual obscenities to women and girls, looking for opportunities to bully. He came from a poor, wretched family. Figuring out how Little Red ended up dead in the river was not a high priority to the police, and Jinx was never really ever at risk of being found out. But the burden of what had happened was heavy, and Jinx sometimes imagined confessing to the police.

> At the police station, they'll take him into an interrogation room. They'll ask questions; he'll answer. His voice slow and hollow-sounding as it has been lately, in school. As if his voice isn't inside him but being thrown across a distance. As if he's a ventriloquist's dummy. (p. 196)

Police stations and classrooms are linked in Jinx's consciousness. Both represent white authority--an authority that will, if possible, determine his fate with little need of reference to the truth, what is right, or Jinx's own dreams.

I should take care here. I am not arguing that classrooms and police stations necessarily are or have to be linked for students who, like Jinx, find no easy place within the dominant meanings and values of society. Classrooms can be better places, learning places. Many already are such places, spaces where--through the hard work of teachers and students--students speak with voices not slow and hollow-sounding, but quick and resonant. Sometimes these spaces are supported by the visions of workshop and critical pedagogy advocates.

Classrooms can be better places, and we have a moral obligation, as educators, to make them so. But just because we are working to make them better doesn't mean that students don't confront problems in expressing themselves in classrooms, problems originating in conflicts with peers and teachers, in difficult choices of who they will be in relation to school and a larger, heterogeneous social world. I'm not trying to be a glass-half-empty person. I'm arguing that if our ideas of something better are linked to the flourishing of student voice in classrooms, then our theorizing and efforts to make things better have to account for the risks and problems students face in expressing themselves there.

Perhaps in a better world than Oates' novel--in a better world than we live in now?--Jinx could have told his story to Mrs. Dunphy and the police, and expected to be understood and treated fairly. But that's not the world he lived in, not the world he wrote in.

Voice as project

It's strange. Advocates of writing workshops and critical pedagogy are profoundly dissatisfied with the status quo. They want our ideas of writing and education, our teaching and learning in schools, our society, to move, change, grow, transform into something better. And yet their work portrays student voice as surprisingly static, undeveloping. In part, this problem can be understood with reference to my criticism of workshop and critical pedagogy conceptions of voice above: A sense of student voice as dynamic or in-process can be lost when the complexities, the struggles, the pushes and pulls of actually speaking and writing in classrooms are ignored. But student voice is rendered inert within the writings of workshop and critical pedagogy advocates for other reasons as well.

For workshop advocates, voice is the authentic expression of a stable, pre-existing (Enlightenment) self. From this perspective, a student writer may need to look for, *discover*, her voice in her drafting and revision of texts, but her voice (like her self) is always already there,

always already finished. Thus, while individual texts may be constructed or developed, there is little sense of the student's voice undergoing construction or development--voice is *found*, not created.[13]

I argued above that student voice was a starting point within the pedagogical scheme of critical pedagogists. Consequently, advocates of critical pedagogy pay quite a bit of attention to the contributions that student voice can make to critical, collective work in the classroom. But they do not attend to what this critical work means for the transformation of individual student voices. In other words, critical pedagogists may sketch how a student's story becomes the basis of a critical dialogue among teacher and students. Their focus on voice-as-starting-point, however, leads to the neglect of how this critical dialogue then impacts the development of that student's voice. Within the writings of critical pedagogists, student voice remains frozen at the beginning of the educational process.

We need a revised, alternative conception of student voice--one that affirms workshop and critical pedagogy commitments to student expression and participation, but also helps us see student voice as in-process and embedded, for better and for worse, within the immediate social context of the classroom. In the remainder of my paper, I sketch such an alternative. I propose that voice be conceived of as a project involving *appropriation*, *social struggle*, and *becoming*. Before discussing each of these aspects, a few words on why I am proposing that we think of voice as a project.

A project takes time, has duration. So voice, here, is not construed as already-finished or frozen, but as developing across time and situation. I would extend the prominent workshop images of writing as a craft or process to voice; that is, imagine our voices as something we can craft, as something we can develop with work.

A project also suggests material to be worked, stuff to be manipulated. Voice-as-project resonates, then, with critical pedagogists' calls for a transformed recitation in which student contributions are grabbed hold of by the classroom community and shook for integrity. Critical pedagogists, however, only help us imagine collective work on student voice. We also need to be able to make sense of and support individual projects, individual students working and reworking the stuff of their lives.

Finally, "project" has something of the smell and feel of school to it, the sense of a task or problem *taken up by actual students* as part of their everyday school work. Imagining voice as a project, then, might help us keep our thinking about voice closer to the ground, closer to the struggles, victories, failures, of Jinx and Stephan and Anita, as they respond to the challenges and possibilities of complex social situations in the classroom. At the same time, construing voice as a project reaffirms the activity, the agency, of student writers in the production of their voices.

This is perhaps the strongest connection of my alternative conception of voice to those of critical pedagogy and workshop advocates. In the end, these advocates use the idea of voice to signal and call for the active presence of students in their own educations. Same here.

Appropriation

We begin with the social self sketched above and assumed by critical pedagogists--a multiple, in-process self created with the cultural resources made available by a complex social environment. My conception of voice is concerned with the speaking and writing of this emerging self, especially in schools.[14]

The notion of appropriation emphasizes the activity of the self in the face of cultural resources. That is, the concrete individual does not stand passive before the experiences, languages, histories, stories that confront her, but assimilates and does work on these resources in crafting a self and a voice. In crafting her voice, the individual responds to and transforms the utterances of others in the production of her own speaking and writing. Thus, on the one hand, the idea of appropriation reminds us that our voices are dependent on the voices of others who

preceded us and provided us with words to use. Kamberelis and Scott (1992) write that

> As individuals experience the language of others through social interaction, they collect words, phrases, styles, and structures and integrate them, forming a new synthetic object which we might call their individuality as language users and social beings. . . . [This process] transforms social and cultural experiences, particularly conversational experiences, into traces which live on in individual people, contributing to their being and speaking forth whenever the individuals talk or write. (p. 369)

On the other hand, the notion of appropriation highlights the taking over, the working over, by individuals, of the language of others. As Bakhtin (1986) put it: "These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we must assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (p. 89).

For example, in our examination of a third grader's story (Lensmire & Beals, 1994), Diane Beals and I noted a number of appropriations from oral and written sources that the young writer, Suzanne, had made in the writing of her text. Suzanne named some of the characters in her story after classmates. From a novel she was reading, Suzanne appropriated other characters' names, several storylines, and important themes. Within her story, Suzanne had one of her characters call out rhyming lines from the story of the gingerbread man: "Run, run, as fast as you can . . . ." And finally, she appropriated a potent word from the speech of the local peer culture, a word that Suzanne and classmates used to tease and ostracize unfortunate classmates.

Suzanne's appropriations, however, were not simple mimicry or repetition. She adapted and reworked the words and voices of others for her own purposes. Thus, in Suzanne's story, the rhyme from the gingerbread man was altered, and was chanted not by the gingerbread man to the wolf hot on his cookie-heels, but by a brother who was unmercifully teasing his sister:

> Run, run, run,
> As fast as you can,
> You can't catch me
> You're the Zit man.

Saying that someone had "zits" (slang for pimples or acne) or was a "zit face" was a common form of abuse among Suzanne's classmates. Thus, the "Zit man" of the brother's rhyme echoed oral teasing engaged in by Suzanne and others. But Suzanne also reworked and re-evaluated the word "zits" in her appropriation of it. For within Suzanne's story, two important characters--the brother and sister's father, and their older sister--condemn the brother's teasing and his rhyme. In other words, Suzanne's own characters (characters she presents as intelligent and caring in her writing) question the sort of teasing that she and her peers effected orally with "zits."

Suzanne appropriated words, character names, rhymes, storylines, themes, from oral and written sources. She made them her own by giving them her own spin, by adapting them to her own purposes. And in this work, she was engaged in the project of developing her own voice out of the voices of others.

The notion of appropriation helps us to imagine student voice and its development with a concreteness missing from critical pedagogy. It also transforms workshop images of writing and voice. Instead of the writer as one who fishes the depths of subjectivity for morsels worthy of presentation, here we may well imagine the writer as the fish itself, swimming in a rich soup of words, and becoming a bigger or smaller, a faster or slower, a more or less beautiful fish, through its options and choices of what to take into its mouth.

To conclude this section, I'll appropriate Foucault's (1984) discussion of the use of notebooks (*hypomnemata*), in antiquity, to care for and develop the self. For Foucault, these notebooks "constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as

an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation" (p. 364). He emphasized that, although these were personal notebooks, their primary purpose was not, as in later Christian versions, to give an account of oneself, to confess to temptation and failure as part of a process of purification. The contrast Foucault draws between these later and earlier uses of notebooks is analogous to the contrast I would draw between a workshop conception of voice and my alternative:

> The point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the non-said, but, on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself. (p. 365)

Social Struggle

The idea of appropriation certainly suggests that the project of voice involves work. As sketched above, however, it suppresses the emotional turmoil and moral complexity that can accompany speaking and writing, ignores Jinx Fairchild's teeth-gritting, Stephan Daedalus fretting in the shadow of the priest's language, Anita's conflicting desires to protect her privacy and please her teacher. To appropriation, then, we add social struggle as an important aspect of the project of voice. I will point to three sorts of struggle that confront students in the development of their voices, with the recognition that in any actual production of voice, these three may be of varying importance, may blur into one another, may not be so easily identified and separated out.

The first is the struggle to use something old to do something new.[15] That is, the struggle to invest words, phrases, styles, structures that have been used before--the given of convention and tradition--with new meaning, a meaning that is adequate to the student's goals for expression and the demands of the particular speech or writing situation with which he is confronted. Holquist (1990) evokes this struggle when he writes that

> As denizens of the logosphere, the sea of words in which we pass our lives, we are surrounded by forms that in themselves seek the condition of mere being-there, the sheer givenness of brute nature. In order to invest these forms with life and meaning, so that we may be understood and so that the work of the social world may continue, *we must all perforce become authors*. (p. 66; author's emphasis)

For Holquist, to be an author means to struggle to breathe new life into the old words surrounding us. However, we must also recognize the politics of this struggle to appropriate the given. For what if the old words are alien or hostile words from powerful others? Words not easily appropriated for the purposes you would pursue, for the experience of the world you need to share, for the dreams of a different world you would give as a gift?

Heilbrun (1988), for example, argues that women's biographies and autobiographies have long denied women's anger and desires for power and control over their own lives. The autobiographies of women such as Jane Addams and Ida Tarbell contrast sharply with their own accounts of experiences in personal correspondence, and with how they actually lived their lives. In their autobiographies, the work and quests these women determinedly pursued are rendered as good fortune or happenstance: "Each woman set out to find her life's work, but the only script insisted that work discover and pursue her, like the conventional romantic lover" (p. 25). Part of the struggle for women writing their lives, then, has been the struggle to resist and transform an inherited script that suppresses aspects of women's passion and agency.

But to resist or transform the given is risky, as Jinx learned when he tried to breathe new life into the school essay by investing it with personal meaning. His conversation with Mrs. Dunphy reminded him (if he had ever forgotten) that he could not write his text just to please himself. The question confronting Jinx was the one confronting any speaker or writer who wants

to communicate:

> The question (and it is a political question involving the mediation of authority) always must be: how much uniqueness can be smuggled into a formula without it becoming unrecognizable to others? (Holquist, 1990, p. 135)

Becoming "unrecognizable" is especially risky for students in school. For the consequences extend beyond the awkwardness or pain of not being understood, of your audience not comprehending your meaning. The risk is rejection. In his attempt to smuggle himself into the inherited script, Jinx was like women who risk being dismissed as shrill or strident or divisive when they report their anger, like the first grader who violates convention with wobbly letters and invented spellings. Given the pervasiveness of evaluation in schools and students' subordinate positions, the risk of "becoming unrecognizable" is also the risk of not being *recognized* as a competent, worthy student. Sometimes simply being unconventional is enough.

The second social struggle confronting students in schools, then, is the struggle to please or satisfy their audience. So far, I have highlighted student struggles to please the teacher. But we must remember that students often speak and write for other audiences as well, including parents and other members of the family and local community. And within the peer conferences and sharing times of writing workshops, within the "transformed recitations" of critical pedagogy, students' peers loom large as audiences for their speaking and writing.

In her story about a second grader named Sammy, Dyson (1995) points to some of the difficulties and complexities that students face in writing for peers. Sammy joined his class late in the year, and consequently, worked hard to fit into already-established groups of friends and play partners. One of the places he pursued his desire to belong was in Author's Theater--a teacher-sponsored event in the classroom in which children performed their classmates' stories under the direction of the child-authors. Dyson traces how Sammy wrote a series of different sorts of superhero stories in an attempt to provide valued peers with satisfying roles to perform in Author's Theater. After early appropriations of teenage ninja and Superman stories, Sammy settled into writing X-Men stories, which, as Dyson notes, "potentially yielded a large team of good guys. Indeed, these mutant humans, with fantastic powers, soon took over as the dominant superheroes during writing time" (p. 28).

But Sammy was not settled for long. In writing his stories, Sammy followed his male peers in denying satisfying roles to female classmates, and this despite the fact that the X-men stories of comic books and TV cartoons include powerful X-men women. In other words, Sammy pleased only certain members of his peer audience, and he did it by writing stories that reaffirmed traditional gender stereotypes and relations. Girls in Sammy's class resisted his stories, let him know that they were not pleased with the roles he would have them play. Dyson writes that

> In the context of Author's Theater, Sammy *did* work hard to be accepted by the boys, especially Seth, a play leader, and his side kick Jonathon; indeed, he explicitly worried that these children might not like him because of his race. But Sammy shared cultural and racial common ground (not to mention a neighborhood) with Holly and Tina, two working-class girls of color who were very interested in superhero stories *and* who were also the most vocal objectors to the boys' exclusion of girls. Perhaps in part because of this common ground and, more generally, his vulnerability--his desire to please--these girls pushed Sammy hard. (p. 32)

Sammy was confronted with hard choices, choices wrapped up with his identity as a working-class African American second grade boy and his desire to be accepted (recognized) by his classmates. Would he continue to write for and in solidarity with his male classmates, including the middle class, European American Seth and Jonathon? What about Holly and Tina? Did he

want to deny his common ground with them, and deny them agency in his stories? Could he somehow please both boys and girls in his class, given their seeming conflicting ideological positions on gender roles and relations?

Sammy's experiences point to the third social struggle students encounter in pursuing the project of voice in the classroom: the struggle to choose. Student speakers and writers are confronted with multiple voices expressing multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the world. They are confronted with multiple audiences making multiple and sometimes conflicting demands. In the appropriation of certain voices (and not others), and in the particular ways they rework these voices, students position themselves with and against certain meanings and values, with and against certain audiences, in a social setting marked by asymmetries of power. Thus, the central challenge that Bakhtin (1984) claimed confronts the heroes of Dostoevsky's novels, also confronts our students:

> All that matters is the choice, the resolution of the question "Who am I" and "With whom am I?" To find one's own voice and to orient it among other voices, to combine it with some and to oppose it to others, to separate one's voice from another voice with which it has inseparably merged--these are the tasks that the heroes solve in the course of the novel. (p. 239)

In the course of her study, Dyson's (1995) classroom hero, Sammy, gradually worked to separate his voice (at least somewhat) from those of his male peers, and created superhero stories that included good roles for girls in his class. Indeed, he eventually described the characters in his stories not as X-men, but as "X-people" (p. 34).

Still, any choice means saying no to other choices. And we must not underestimate the difficulty, risk, and pain that can accompany saying no to powerful voices and audiences.

If Foucault (surprisingly) helped me end the previous section on a rather up-beat note, I'll intone Marx to close this section on social struggle. In his preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, Marx (1978/1867) chided fellow Germans who comforted themselves with the belief that, because Germany was less developed industrially, it avoided the worst of the modern evils of capitalist production, as evidenced in England. Marx countered: Not only did Germany have plenty of modern evils, but it was also plagued by a "whole series of inherited evils . . . arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms" (p. 296).

In their speaking and writing, students strive to satisfy multiple, living audiences who reward and punish their efforts. They also struggle with a complex language inheritance, struggle to choose among and to redirect old words to new meanings. Students may well agree with Marx: "We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead."

Becoming

Perhaps you noticed the peculiar movement of my thinking on voice across the discussions of appropriation and social struggle. My discussion of the struggles that students confront in producing voice made a *problem* out of what I had just said was the very way that students' voices develop. That is, appropriation, as the taking over and reworking of others' language, became the occasion for difficulty and strife.

We will move peculiarly again, here. We will partially recast the role of social struggle in the project of voice, not to forget its dangers, but to recognize its possibilities. For the very struggles that put the project of voice at risk are also the very possibility for growth and change. The new arises out of the struggle with the old, out of the struggle to please self and other, out of the struggle to stand with and against others and their words. To appropriation and social struggle, then, we add *becoming* as an important aspect of my conception of student voice.

What does the addition of becoming entail?

First, a recognition that there are no guarantees. The development of voice can, has, and will go in directions other than becoming. In other words, if becoming suggests an opening up of student voices, it also points to the possibility that they can be shut down. They can be shut down when the student is overwhelmed by the inadequacy of the available or required voices for meaningful expression, despairs at bridging the gap between old and new (O'Connor, 1989). They can be shut down when students refuse to speak or write in the face of hostile audiences and official voices, perhaps out of confusion and fear, but also out of dissent and anger--a silence grown out of a "deeply felt rage at those who live their unexamined privilege as entitlement" (Lewis, 1993, p. 3). Student voices can be shut down, as well, when students refuse to pay attention to other voices (if Sammy plugs his ears in response to Holly and Tina), and their voices harden, calcify, as habit (and not struggle) determines choice.

Second, making becoming part of the project of voice means that students and teachers are choosing, are valuing, what Dewey (1938) called growth or the reconstruction of experience; that is, the continual movement to "experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality" (p. 47). In terms of the project of voice, we might characterize becoming as the refusal, in our speaking and writing, to merely repeat the old. Instead, we are aiming for the reconstruction of the old--old words, old relations with audiences, old choices--in the service of the ongoing renewal of our perspectives on the world and our places within it. Becoming points to taking a position in relation to others and the meanings and values that precede us. But it also points to revising that position, that voice, across time.

Finally, the inclusion of becoming in our conception of voice-as-project entails the recognition that students can't do it all by themselves. Students may be plagued by the living and the dead, but they need both if their voices are to continue developing. There is no way to fashion the new without the appropriation of the old. There is no opportunity for affirmation from your audience and the energy of collaboration, without the risk of rejection. And there is no chance to become who you want to become, to speak with a voice that is yours--even as that voice sounds with the voices of others with whom you've learned and struggled--without the pain that often accompanies saying *this*, and not *that*. Students need others if their voices are to continue to develop. Within the classroom, they need teachers who recognize their struggles for voice, and help them transform these struggles into occasions for becoming.[16]

In the end, committing ourselves to becoming is committing ourselves to a view of what it means to be human. It is to align ourselves with Dewey's belief that humanity is

> a participant in an unfinished universe rather than a spectator of a finished one. In order to survive and exalt our existence, we must creatively solve our problems and evolve life-affirming values, perhaps of a kind that have never before existed. (Garrison, 1995, p. 18).

Bakhtin says somewhere that *to be* is *to communicate* (actually, he probably says this everywhere). And to communicate is to struggle to speak and write in ways that somehow answer to the unique demands of unique situations that have never occurred before. In other words, Bakhtin saw demands for becoming in our everyday existence, saw struggle and creativity as facts of life.

In Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, an old Scrooge looked back with joy at his employment under a man named Fezziwig. It was not that the work that Scrooge and his co-laborers performed was easy--the work was very hard, toilsome. But in Fezziwig's treatment of Scrooge and the others, in his way of being with them, Scrooge said that Fezziwig had the power to make the work heavy or light--and Fezziwig made it light.

The project of voice is hard. Appropriation, social struggle, and becoming demand labor, risk-taking, imagination. The challenge for those of us who would have student voices flourish in schools is to extend the work of writing workshop and critical pedagogy advocates, and continue

to find better ways of being with students--ways that make the unavoidable burdens of voice . . . light.

A conclusion

One of the last times we see Jinx Fairchild in *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart*, he is about to interact, again, with someone who works for an important institution of white authority. Jinx is twenty-four years old, married, searching for meaningful work (his shot at college ended with a broken ankle in the final basketball game of his senior year). But this time, the person behind the desk is black. And when Jinx approaches, the person stands, embraces his hand. And to Jinx's surprise, the person even recognizes him, calls him by the name that celebrated his nerve, his power, on the basketball floor, the name he was known by when life seemed open.

> Birth certificate carefully folded in his inside jacket pocket, Jinx Fairchild takes the bus uptown on this Saturday morning in November 1963 to the United States Army recruiting station on South Main Street and first thing he sees, shyly entering the office, is that the smartly uniformed man behind the counter, seated at a desk, is black . . . which he hadn't envisioned.
>
> At once he's flooded with relief.
>
> Then the second amazing thing: this man Jinx Fairchild doesn't know, could swear he has never laid eyes on before, strong-boned handsome face, skin dark as Jinx's own, a man in his mid-thirties at least, is evidently from Hammond, for it seems he knows Jinx, or recognizes him: rising quickly to his feet, reaching across the counter to shake Jinx's hand, smiling, happy, deep booming voice: "*Iceman*--isn't it?" (p. 367)

Jinx was recognized, accepted, not by his teacher, but by his army recruiting officer. And he would lend the powers of his body, not the powers of his voice, to his country's project. November, 1963--signing up then, the month JFK was killed, would give him enough time to get ready for Vietnam.

I'll conclude with a few lines from West's (1989) statement of what it is we might learn if we pay close attention to the voice of W.E.B. Du Bois. They are an appropriately hopeful and sobering conclusion to my meditation:

> Creative powers reside among the wretched of the earth even in their subjugation, and the fragile structures of democracy in the world depend, in large part, on how these powers are ultimately exercised. (p. 148)

Notes

1 My own work and thinking have been most concerned with elementary schools. So for me, the writing workshop advocates who have been most influential are Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins. Donald Murray, though more closely identified with college composition, has also been important, because his work introduced me to workshop approaches. As for advocates of critical pedagogy: Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks have probably been most influential. It seems, however, that Giroux has given the most explicit attention to the idea of voice, and, consequently, my comments on voice in critical pedagogy are based largely in his work. I should note that neither writing workshop nor critical pedagogy advocates write only about *student* voice--workshop advocates make no real distinction between voice for student writers and other writers; and critical pedagogists sometimes write of teacher and curriculum voices, in addition to student voice. And of course, other educators and researchers have written productively about voice, especially teacher voice. As part of my broader project--a project focused on revising workshop approaches in ways that better link them to goals of radical democracy--I will be examining the teacher's role and responsibilities (as well as problems the teacher confronts in living out that role) in the workshop, and teacher voice will be an important part of that examination. My focus here, however, is student voice. Finally, I should note that I have not had the chance to make the recently published edited volume, *Voices on Voice* (Yancey, 1994), a part of my reflections here.

2 All quotations from Oates' novel, unless noted, come from this vignette (pp. 173-175).

3 I wonder what Mrs. Dunphy would say about her creator's writing, since Oates' novels are full of RUN-ON SENTENCES. One of my favorites, from *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang* (1994):

> Huron Radiator, Hammond's largest employer (as it was always boasting) had laid off one-fifth of its employees last year with the brazen intention of relocating some of its operations in West Virginia where nonunion workers could be hired, and there was a long bitter sporadically violent strike in effect against Ferris Plastics where Muriel used to work, we saw the strikers marching carrying their red-lettered A.F. OF L. STRIKE signs we saw their drawn faces, worried angry eyes the eyes of men and women who don't control their futures knowing FINANCES are the wormy heart of our civilization, can you live in dignity with such a truth? (p. 213)

4 For Berlin (1988), workshop advocates embrace an "expressionistic rhetoric" that is the descendant of both Rousseau and Romantic responses to nineteenth-century capitalism. This rhetoric assumes an autonomous, stable self who takes up relations with the world in order to make sense of it and herself, and is characterized by a radical individualism that portrays the individual as the source and final arbiter of what *is*, of what is *good*, and of what is *possible*. It is not that the reality of material, social, and linguistic aspects of the world are denied, but that

> They are considered significant only insofar as they serve the needs of the individual. All fulfill their true function only when being exploited in the interests of locating the individual's authentic nature. (p. 484)

Expressionistic rhetoric's critique of society emerges from this demand that the material and social contexts of the individual support the pursuit and discovery of personal meaning. Berlin argues that this rhetoric has been closely tied to psychological theories that assert the inherent goodness of the individual, and that within expressionistic rhetoric, this inherent goodness is, of course, "distorted by excessive contact with others in groups and institutions" (p. 484). All too

often, social relations and institutions (such as schools) corrupt human nature and demand conformity to petty social convention, rather than provide the supportive backdrop for a flourishing individuality.

5 At first glance, it seems that Iceman might be the male Enlightenment ideal, until we remember that this ideal includes the opposition of mind and body. For Jinx, Iceman flourished on the basketball court, where Jinx's identity was "so much a matter of fluidity, sloping shoulders, elastic spine, sly head cocked to one side" (Oates, 1990, p. 403). But Iceman certainly seems related to "Cool Cat"--one of the character types Perkins describes in his *Home is a Dirty Word: The Social Oppression of Black Children*:

> The Cool Cat often appears indifferent to the problems around him, as though he is insensitive to pain, frustration or death. He rarely allows his real inner feelings to surface . . . . The Street Institution has trained him to act in this manner, to be cool, stern, impersonal in the face of all kinds of adversities. (cited in Gilyard, 1991, p. 112)

6 Bakhtin uses "languages" to stand both for what he calls "national languages" such as Spanish or English, as well as dialects and "ways with words" (Heath, 1983) within a single national language.

7 I am simplifying a bit here, with the characterization of voice as endpoint in writing workshop and voice as starting point in critical pedagogy. Workshop advocates will sometimes talk of voice as a driving force or essential ingredient in the writing process itself (Graves, 1983). Thus, voice is linked not only to a quality of the text produced, but to the assumed natural desire to express the self. Within critical pedagogy, voice is sometimes used to suggest a desired endpoint in the development of the individual, as when Giroux (1988) calls for "a voice capable of speaking in one's own terms, a voice capable of listening, retelling, and challenging the very grounds of knowledge and power" (p. 71).

8 Workshop advocates do recognize that teachers and students need to learn how to respond effectively to student-written texts, and they offer various sorts of prescriptions toward that end. But the only problem they seem to recognize is some sort of limited technical know-how. They ignore all sorts of other problems that might confound helpful response, including conflict among peers and between teachers and students--see Lensmire (1993).

9 There are exceptions--for example, Lewis & Simon (1986) and Weiler (1988). Work such as this leads to more complex renderings of pedagogy within work on critical pedagogy. But it doesn't seem that such work has led to serious revisions of the idea of student voice.

10 With the help of the regular classroom teacher, I tried in a number of ways to make the workshop a safe, supportive place for all children, with limited success. I examine, in detail, the responses of children to peer relations in this workshop in Chapter 4, "Peer Audiences and Risk," and Chapter 5, "Fiction, Distance, and Control," of Lensmire (1994a).

11 See Florio-Ruane (1991) and Ulichney & Watson-Gegeo (1989) for helpful discussions of the difficulties teachers and students face when they try to transform traditional teacher-dominated talk in writing conferences.

12 I got this Joycean example of inner conflict over language from McDermott's (1988) wonderful piece on "Inarticulateness."

13 Gilbert (1989b) notes that even the crafting of texts and revision (especially in response to response from peers and teacher) are sometimes considered suspect by certain supporters of workshop approaches. Why? Because, within this perspective, the expression of personal meaning is often linked to spontaneity--and calls for spontaneity don't necessarily go well with calls for revision and better communication with your audience.

14 I don't have a good way to write about this yet, but my concern is to not reduce the self to voice. The conception of student voice that I am pursuing assumes that voice is an aspect of the self, but not the whole self. I want to limit student voice to actual speaking and writing, even as this speaking and writing would certainly be seen as linked to and in interaction with other actions of the self (thinking, non-verbal communication, dancing, playing sports, etc.).

15 Wertsch (1991) writes about this struggle in terms of an inherent tension between, on the one hand, mediational means or impersonal tools, and on the other, the unique, personal uses to which these means are put.

16 A stunning example of this is provided by Soliday (1994) in her discussion of the use of literacy narratives to help college students make sense of their own paths into schooling and literacy. In terms of my discussion here, what is most important about Soliday's piece is its portrayal of students who--in the struggle to choose between the languages and identities brought from home, and those demanded in schools--refused to resolve these tensions by choosing one or the other. That is, they rejected old choices and created new ones; they performed "imaginative acts of self-representation in order, as Eva Hoffman puts it, to translate 'between the two stories and two vocabularies' 'without being split by the difference'" (p. 522).

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